

## Role of Board Members in Managing Crises

### Issue:

Crises arise on campus in many forms: a tornado destroys campus buildings, a student is assaulted, an employee embezzles funds, a labor dispute arises, a fire takes the life of a student, enrollment unexpectedly drops, protests arise over a campus event. The ability of campus leaders to anticipate and respond to campus crises will determine the immediate and lasting effects of the events on the institution and on those involved.

### Best Practices:

Communication is the key to managing unexpected events, disasters, and emergencies on campus. It is the president's responsibility to take charge of the communication process and to ensure that trustees are fully informed about all aspects of the crisis, including a clear and full description of the event or situation and the steps that are being taken to address the problem. Likewise, board members have a responsibility to make the president aware of issues or events that might escalate into a crisis situation for the institution. Above all, there should be no surprises.

Russell Carey, a vice president at Brown University, advises campus leaders to immediately communicate the situation or crisis to the campus community. "Such communications provide assurance that steps are being taken to gather and assess the information, caution against a rush to judgment in the absence of facts, and tell the community what to expect next. They can also be a calming influence in a volatile situation... and will provide the administration with some, albeit not much, time to work on the problem."

Lawrence Gibbs of Stanford University, writing for the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges' *Trusteeship* magazine, identifies seven questions trustees should ask about their institution's emergency and crisis planning.

1. Does the institution have the leadership and organization in place to provide proper and ongoing support for emergency preparedness?
2. Is a process in place to ensure that the institution's risk and hazards have been clearly specified and quantified?
3. What is the extent and status of university insurance to cover disaster losses?
4. What policies or practices can officials initiate to reduce the institution's vulnerability to disaster?
5. Is emergency planning integrated and supported throughout the entire institution?
6. Has the university established appropriate relationships with external emergency groups (community organizations and government agencies)?
7. Are meaningful emergency response and recovery practice sessions held regularly? Are the lessons from these experiences and actual emergencies incorporated into the updated plan?

### Sources Consulted:

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